



Winter 2003 ... Marketing Your Child Care Business!



O F C *An early childhood education agency*

Attract Clients with Your Contract



More than just an agreement between parent and provider, a good child care contract also makes your business more attractive to parents looking for quality child care.

Why? Because it tells parents that you are a professional who views child care as serious business. And it gains you respect by showing all that is involved in child care. Your contract should include:

- Children's names, addresses, and dates of birth.
- Parent work information (address, phone and cell phone numbers).
- Emergency contact persons.
- Immunization record requests.
- Authorization for emergency treatment.
- Cost, late fees, method of payment.
- Pickup times/arrival times.
- Discipline philosophy.
- Sick policy (including policy for mildly and moderately ill children).
- Transportation of children.
- Emergency plan.
- Days of operation/vacation backup arrangements.
- Policy for parents to visit unannounced.

Some providers explain their policies and procedures in a separate brochure or handbook. Often there is not enough room for this detail on the contract form. A handbook lets you express your ideas about children and what they need, talk about the activities you offer, and anything else you want parents to know about your business.

Your child care specialist can help you develop a contract or call the Office for Children at (703) 324-8100 for technical assistance.

Update

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The Initial Interview – Make It Count!

Make your initial interview with parents looking for child care count. It could be your best (and last) chance for new business. The checklist below provides step-by-step guidelines for your next interview.

- ✧ Show parents your permit or license and discuss what you did to get it.
- ✧ Discuss the parent's goals for their child and your child care philosophy.
- ✧ Invite parents to tour your child care space, including the outdoor play area.
- ✧ Share with parents any training you have attended. Show certificates.
- ✧ Review program policies – hours of operation, payment schedule, holidays, vacations, illness policies, substitute care, termination notice, etc.

- ✧ Give parents an overview of a typical day in your program. Photographs of children at play can help make this more personal.
- ✧ Discuss feeding and meal plans. Who provides the food? What meals and snacks are provided? Do the parents have any food related issues?
- ✧ Share your guidance policy.
- ✧ Provide written references for parents.

"I put my business card and flyer in laundromats, grocery stores, and apartment buildings. My child care parents also recommend me to other parents. I also work with the Child Care Assistance Program. These things have helped me a lot to find children for my business."

Nelly Mattos, Child Care Provider, Falls Church

Portfolio Gives Your Business a "Professional Touch"

Market your child care business like other professionals do -- with a business portfolio! A portfolio shows and tells in pictures and words what your child care program offers. It allows you to highlight the best aspects of your program and adds a professional touch to your initial interview with parents. Include the following items in your portfolio:

- Photos of children in your care and the activities you provide for them.
- A statement describing your philosophy on quality child care. (Why it matters, why it is important to you.)
- A brief autobiography that talks about who you are, why you chose to work with children, and the education or experience that prepared you for your work.
- Aspects of child care that particularly interest you (for example, early learning and literacy.)
- Letters of recommendation from other clients past and present.
- A schedule of your daily activities with children.

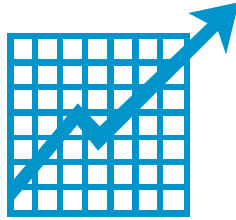
- Your child care contract.
- Training and professional certificates (including your Pediatric CPR/First Aid Certificate).
- A copy of your USDA Food Program agreement with a statement on the importance of good nutrition.
- A description of your emergency and substitute care plans.
- A copy of the flyer you use to advertise your business.

"My families know their children are coming into a loving, homey environment. It's one of my main selling points because my advertising is all word of mouth. I have parties all year round – birthday parties for all the children, Halloween parties, Thanksgiving parties, and especially a Christmas party. I want everyone to know they are welcome into my child care home at any time. But in December, I invite all the children and families – past and present – to visit. We get to see how everybody has grown up."

Claudia Moonen, Child Care Provider, Alexandria

Food Program Helps Your Business Grow!

Join the USDA Child Care Food Program and watch your child care business grow. USDA Food Program providers follow simple nutrition guidelines for children's meals and snacks and keep a record of the food they serve. Here's what they get in return.



More Business! Parents know that Food Program providers serve their children nutritious meals and snacks. Given a choice, they often choose Food Program providers to care for their children.

More Money! The Food Program reimburses providers for meals and snacks served to children. The extra money helps providers keep their rates competitive and their incomes stable.

More Visibility! Parents recognize and respect the Food Program. They look for Food Program participation when they search for child care providers on the web and interview providers.

More Training! Food Program providers get priority consideration for free Office for Children training opportunities. They receive training credits they need to renew their child care permits.

More Professionalism! Joining the Food Program is a professional choice. It shows parents -- your clients -- that you care about quality child care.

Put the USDA Food Program to work for you. Call (703) 324-8100 and ask for a Food Program application today!

Telephone Tips to Make Your Business Grow!

Very often a parent's first step in choosing a provider begins with a telephone call. Good telephone technique can make the difference between new business and lost business. Follow the telephone tips below and watch your business grow!

- Answer your phone in a professional, business-like way: (*"Hello, this [name of your business]. May I help you?"*)
- Try to sound upbeat, optimistic, and knowledgeable even if you are not having your best day. (*Parents will want to visit with providers who make a good first impression over the telephone.*)
- Keep a message pad by your phone and take down the name and number of the caller.
- If you cannot answer the phone use an answering machine or service with a professional sounding message asking callers for their name and phone number. (*Call back as soon as possible.*)
- If children need your attention during a call, tell the caller you will call them back. (*This reassures parents that children are your first priority.*)
- Do not let preschool children answer the phone. (*Parents may think it is unprofessional.*)
- Be prepared to tell callers about your business, answer questions, and set up a time for a meeting. (*Things to tell parents: You have a permit or license, Pediatric CPR/First Aid training, and participate in the USDA Food Program. The number and ages of children in your care, where your business is located, and your hours of child care. Things you enjoy doing with children.*)
- Ask parents about their children's unique interests and needs.
- A cheery farewell reinforces the good impression you have already made on the caller: (*"Thanks for calling. I look forward to meeting you in person. Have a great day!"*)

Ten Ways to Market Your Child Care Business for Under \$10

- Write down what makes your child care business special. (*What are your strengths? What special activities, training, and services do you offer?*)
- Design a simple, easy to read flyer for advertising your “special” business.
- Use business cards wherever you go.
- Use a business-like approach when talking with parents on the telephone about your child care services.
- Make sure that your home looks welcoming and professional for visiting parents and children.
- Be creative and put together marketing materials that show off your business. Examples might be scrapbooks, newsletters, notes to parents, letters of reference, training certificates.
- Ask parents to refer other parents to you.
- Stay in touch with parents even after their children leave your care.
- Get together with other providers from your neighborhood or join a family child care association to share marketing ideas and referrals.
- Be yourself! When you are out with children you are caring for, show your love for what you do by doing it well. You market your business every time others see you at work.

“Ten Ways to Market Your Business for Under \$10” provided by the Women’s Business Center of Northern Virginia and the Fairfax County Office for Women.